

Background Noise by insatiablegaydesire

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Angst, Emotional Hurt/Comfort, Fluff, Fluff and Angst, Gen, Hurt/Comfort, Implied/Referenced Abuse, Implied/Referenced Alcohol Abuse/Alcoholism, platonic will and max are the focus of this fic, please stay safe everybody, the lumax is only hinted at in the beginning, warning for victims talking about their experiences

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Characters: Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Will Byers

Relationships: Maxine "Max" Mayfield/Lucas Sinclair, Will Byers & Maxine "Max" Mayfield

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Summary:

"Max had always prided herself on staying out of other people's business. She didn't like it when they got in hers, so she did her best to stay out of theirs. But when she saw Will quietly excuse himself from the overloaded couch in the Wheelers' basement, his face carefully held together, hands gripping the bottom of his shirt, she couldn't help but follow. Call her nosy, call her a stalker, but her intuition was one she trusted, and her gut was telling her that something was wrong."

Max and Will bond over their similar pasts, finding someone safe to confide in.

Background Noise

Author's Note:

This was meant as a Christmas gift to my gf Amy, who is also in the fandom (peep her tumblr @moondans), but its a liiiittle bit late. Nonetheless, babe, I hope you enjoy it (and all the rest of you too!!). I love you. xx

Max had always prided herself on staying out of other people's business. She didn't like it when they got in hers, so she did her best to stay out of theirs. But when she saw Will quietly excuse himself from the overloaded couch in the Wheelers' basement, his face carefully held together, hands gripping the bottom of his shirt, she couldn't help but follow. Call her nosy, call her a stalker, but her intuition was one she trusted, and her gut was telling her that something was wrong. Lucas dragged his gaze away from the soap on screen and shot her a concerned look when she got up. She gave him a reassuring smile, and he nodded, trying to hide the hint of worry still left on his features. She tried not to think about how she didn't deserve that worry wasted on her.

Max made her way around the bend of the wall, to where the Wheelers' washer and dryer sat. Will leaned against one of the machines, his back facing her, and when she got closer, she could hear a soft sniffing amongst the TV chatter traveling from the next room over. She rested her hip against the same machine he was touching, making sure to tap it loud enough to alert him to her presence.

Will looked up and then quickly away, blinking through remaining tears. His hand twitched to fiddle with one of the dials on the machines, and he stuttered out, "I-I'm sorry, I just- I-"

Max stopped him with a firm hand on his shoulder. He met her gaze with wide, terrified eyes. "It's okay. You don't need to explain. I understand."

Will's brow dropped in confusion, then launched up in surprise. "Did

they-" his voice cracked. He cleared his throat, dropping his hand limply from the machine. "...Did they tell you about him?"

Max didn't know who Will's 'him' was, but she also knew exactly who he was. Long hair and a smug smirk flashed in her mind, and she blinked away the pain that spread behind her eyes. She turned, her back resting against the wall, and slid down until she sat with her arms folded across her bent knees. "They didn't have to."

Will sniffed, but other than that remained silent, and joined her in the spot against the wall. They stared at the aging wood paneling in front of them, sitting with the knowledge that they were both completely understanding and completely ignorant of each other.

Max broke through the solid silence first. Her voice sounded scratchy and rough when she said, "Was it something in the show that reminded you of him?"

"More like the entire episode itself." Will picked at the carpet beneath them with his fingernails, pulling up piece after piece of mustard-colored shag.

Max took a deep breath in, then let it rush out. "Background noise," she identified. Certain songs on the radio got her thinking all messed up because they had been blasting in Billy's car during particularly bad times. She remembered once freezing in a store with her mom because the opening riff of Heart of Glass had sounded from behind the cash register.

"Yeah." Will turned his head away from the wall to look at Max. "When my dad was still around, I wasn't usually his target." His mouth suddenly felt very dry, and he licked at his bottom lip to try and relieve the uncomfortable feeling. "Sometimes he would try to go after me, but Jonathan would always get there first. He'd stand in front of me. Get in Dad's face, try to provoke him so he'd be the one to get the beating instead. But one night... Jonathan was out at a friend's house. And Dad came home..." Will choked out the next word: "Drunk." He bit down on his lip hard and banged his head once on the wall behind it, breathing out a shaky laugh. "That was on the TV when it happened. I could hear the- the laughing." A tear streaked its way down his cheek. "I felt like they were laughing at

me. Like I deserved it.” He buried his face in his hands, and muttered out, “God, he’s right, I’m such a freak.”

Max clenched her jaw at the name. She ignored her ever present caution when it came to talking about her family, and blurted out, “My brother had this pair of boots he used to wear every day.” This caused Will to lift his face from his hands just a little bit, so Max pushed on. “They were black, and chunky, and they made a heavy clunking sound when he walked. Whenever I would hear those boots, I would feel so... scared.” Max shuddered from the memory. “Mike’s mom sometimes wears these heels, and when she walks on the floor above us, it feels like he’s here. And all the feeling leaves my chest, and I feel empty, but not empty like there’s something that could fill it, but empty like all the space inside me just... disappeared. Like it doesn’t exist anymore. Like it never did.” She swallowed down the heavy feeling growing in her throat. “So if you’re a freak, then I’m a freak too.”

Will, though comforted, housed a shadow of guilt behind his eyes. “I got away from my monster. You still live with yours.”

“Some days are better than others,” Max said, a hint of a smile pushing at her cheeks. “Some days I think he finally realized how much of a dick he’s been, and he’s trying to be better. And he lets me wear his nice denim jacket out, and he doesn’t threaten to hurt me if I’m back home late.” The smile faded, as did the focus in her eyes. “But then I get back and... *he’s* back. And he rips the jacket off of me, and tells me I’m the reason his life is shit, and I just, I can’t believe I’d be so stupid. That I’d believe he could ever be someone other than who he is and always has been.”

Max’s eyes lost their glazed look, and she shook her head, as if returning to reality from some place she had gone to for a time. “But, that’s not the point. You’re a nice kid, Will, but you have to make sure you don’t take on the burdens of other people. Especially your friends.”

Will blinked multiple times, his face contorted in a bemused expression. Unsure of himself, he mumbled, “And we’re... friends?”

Max scoffed, almost laughing out at the question. “Byers, I didn’t

crawl into some weird alien underground maze just to come back and ignore you. Yeah, we're friends. So don't put yourself down!" She playfully punched at his shoulder, smile wide. "That shit's not cool."

Suddenly, Max stood up from her sitting position against the wall, her eyes bright with an idea. She extended a hand to Will. "Hey. I'm sure the episode is done by now. Maybe we can convince them to put on a movie. What d'ya say?"

Will smiled, and took her hand.